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By

Miss Marian Derby

*Latin American Churches
and North American Organizations*



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As the Second Latin American Evangelical Conference closed its sessions in Lima, Peru, the first week of August, 1961, it reaffirmed the message which had been its theme — "Jesus Christ, The Hope for Latin America." This affirmation was made in full recognition of the many social and economic problems with which these countries are faced.

In the closing days of this conference, another meeting was opened in Punta del Este in Uruguay, where government leaders came together to talk about the proposed Alliance for Progress for Latin America. Here they proclaimed that the hope for the Latin American countries lay in the governments cooperating to eliminate poverty, improve housing, erase illiteracy, provide for public health programs, agrarian reforms, a stabilized market and a diversified economy. This program was to cost one hundred billion dollars over the next ten years, and the United States agreed to pay twenty billion of this.

Probably most people would agree that the real hope for the Latin American countries lay in such a meeting as that of Punta del Este, rather than with the small group of Protestant church leaders who had gathered in Lima; and this would perhaps be true. However, the Lima meeting did not insinuate that the people who had gathered there were the hope for the Latin American countries but rather that Jesus Christ is that hope. It may be that He will be proclaimed as much through the program of the Alliance for Progress as by the churches! Certainly, unless that is true, the Alliance for Progress is not the total answer to the problem of the Latin American countries.

Both meetings show that the problems of the lands south of the Rio Grande are the concern of the whole hemisphere and not just of those who may be directly involved because of their proximity to these problems. Though there was no talk of a twenty billion dollar contribution in the Lima meeting, there was no question but that in all of the conversations and the committee meetings, in the reports and in the papers read, there was an awareness of a relationship to North American churches and Protestant organizations in the United States. In some cases, this was resented. From the early beginning of the planning of the Conference to the writing of the final reports, it was insisted that this was a Latin American meeting. However, Protestant history in these countries is too short for people not to be aware of its relationship to that of North America. At the Conference, this relationship was evident in missionaries who had been elected by national bodies to represent them and by visitors from the United States who had been especially invited to attend. These did not represent remnants of a past dependence but an active present influence which had to be recognized.

Past Contribution of North American Churches

In what ways have the North American churches contributed to the development of the Latin American churches during the past years? In the first place, there is the role of the "founders." Except for the Waldensean Church in Uruguay and Argentina, the foreign language churches serving European immigrants, and a few churches directly related to the British Missionary Societies (the Evangelical Union of South America, the New Testament Missionary Union, Plymouth Brethren are examples), the Protestant churches in these countries were started by missionaries from the United States or Canada.

The second contribution might be called the "form" of the Church. Perhaps because they were founded by missionaries from North America, the churches have adopted their ecclesiastical structure, the congregational organization, the institutional outreach of the North American churches. This is true of those churches which are directly related to denominations in the North, and in large part, of those churches which were started by independent missionaries who had grown up in churches in North America. Thus we have Methodist Annual Conferences, Presbyterian Synods, Baptist Conventions, etc. As to the architecture of the churches in the Latin American countries, one can almost tell when certain buildings were constructed for they reflect the architectural trend of churches in the United States of the same period.

The church related institutions also reflect the influence of their North American founders. Schools put a large emphasis on athletics, extra-curricular activities and English. Great importance is given to democratic procedures, to personality and character development rather than just an academic program. In this they are typical of North American schools in contrast to educational institutions of Europe. Hospitals, public health programs, and social centers similarly reflect the North American influence.

The third contribution of North American churches might be designated "the fundamentals of the faith." In the past, the churches of the North have been largely responsible for the theological thinking of Latin American Protestantism. North American books and magazines have been more widely read than those from other parts of the world; pastors have been trained by North American missionaries or in North American schools. The theological differences of the North have also been passed on and have often become a decisive force in the Latin American Protestant community.

The fourth contribution of the North American Churches can be listed as "funds" - funds which have been given for buildings and equipment, for subsidies to salaries for national pastors and teachers and other full-time church workers, for the general support of the ongoing work. Sometimes these funds were given with no strings attached, simply to be used as the Latin American Church considered wise. In many cases it was the North American Church which determined how they were to be used. As the requests continue to come from the Latin American churches, it is evident that this contribution is not just a thing of the past! It may easily reach the \$20 billion mark set by the Alliance for Progress in years to come!

These contributions (the founding, the form, the fundamentals of the faith, and the funds) have usually been related to missionaries who have gone from the North American churches. These missionaries have been in the past - and will probably continue to be - the most important contribution of the North American Church to Latin American Protestantism.

The Autonomy of the Latin American Churches

Although the Latin American churches have relied very heavily in the past on contributions from North America, during recent years many of them have achieved considerable autonomy. Well trained national leaders are taking the responsibility for decisions even as to where missionaries and mission funds will be used. The Churches are seeking to find ways in which they can better meet the needs of the culture in which they are witnessing and are developing their own distinctive characteristics. For some this has been a developing process since the day of their founding. Others have only recently come into this kind of autonomy. They are *churches*, well organized for their work in these countries, and should no longer be thought of as a missionary appendage of a North American Church.

This does not mean that they are necessarily a strong force in the community. They are still a very small minority and recognize that they do not have adequate resources in either personnel or funds to meet the tremendous challenge of these days in the communities where they are found.

They find themselves in competition not only with the traditional Roman Catholic hierarchy but with a greatly strengthened Roman Catholic program of penetration into every phase of life. They are also competing with the humanism which has long had a great following among the intellectuals and many of the business and professional people

who are anxious to serve humanity but have no place for religion or the church. More recent is the competition of communism with its revolutionary ideals and appeal to many who might have found in Protestantism the beginnings for the hope of a better life.

There is also the competition of new Evangelical groups related to North American missionary organizations. For many a struggling Protestant Church, this has been the greatest blow of all. How can it continue to make a witness in the community when others who profess to share its belief that "Jesus Christ is the Hope for Latin America" come in to proselytize and divide its membership? Often these new groups come with resources in money and equipment which make their work easier and more attractive. Frequently, this small, struggling, local church will have as a pastor a man who has been inadequately prepared for such an invasion and finds it difficult to answer the questions his congregation raises or to meet the threat which he feels from the new group.

We all know that competition sometimes results in a creative situation. It is to be hoped that such competition may create an atmosphere in which the Holy Spirit can work. These new groups may prove a stimulus to the church which has been working in the area and give it a new sense of mission and dedication. It *could* result in an enriched fellowship and a plan for cooperation worked out in local groups. Many of the churches have mature, well trained leaders who will certainly take a place of leadership in such a cooperative program.

The Role of North American Interdenominational Organizations

One of the North American interdenominational organizations closely related to the Latin American churches is the Committee on Cooperation in Latin America, the CCLA. Its history since it was organized at Panamá in 1916 is well known. As an organization made up of representatives of missionary agencies, it has been, as its name suggests, a committee for working on cooperative endeavours, studies, and relationships. One of its primary functions has been to strengthen the national Christian councils or other cooperating groups in the various Latin American countries. It has found a special role in contributing to regional or continental programs in Christian Education curriculum materials, in other Evangelical literature, and in audio-visual aids and mass communication in Spanish and in Portuguese. It has become the vehicle through which its members give cooperatively to the youth and student program in these countries. Since 1952 when it became the Latin American office for the Division of Foreign Missions of the National

Council of Churches of Christ in America, it has become more and more recognized as an authoritative source of information on matters related to Latin American affairs. It continues to serve its thirty-eight member boards and agencies as a "clearing house" for cooperative programs and for consultation.

In recent years, other agencies related to the National Council of Churches have also played a part in the development of the Latin American churches. It is expected that in the future they may find an even greater role in helping the church in its proclamation that "Jesus Christ is the Hope for Latin America." Two of these are functional committees of the Division of Foreign Missions which are very closely related to the CCLA — the Committee on Literature and Literacy (familiarly known as Lit-Lit), and the Radio Visual Education and Mass Communication Committee (known as RAVEMCCO).

Lit-Lit now functions as the coordinator for the interdenominational program of literature publication and distribution, transmitting funds for publications through the CCLA to literature committees which have long been working in Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires, and to Evangelical bookstores related to CCLA member boards. It also promotes literacy programs. Examples of this are the publication of literacy materials and the campaign in Haiti started in 1955, the Guatemalan primer and literacy campaign started in 1958, and the more recent plans for this kind of a program in Brazil and Puerto Rico. Writers' workshops sponsored by Lit-Lit have inspired potential authors in Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico and have given them training especially in the field of writing for new literates or those unaccustomed to reading. It has also coordinated efforts in the publication of such materials in Cuba and more recently in Costa Rica. It sees the need for a study of Evangelical Christian magazines and for a program of publication of a more popular form of Evangelical literature which may reach the masses of the Latin American population. We think of its role as that of counseling in this field, stimulating programs in the Latin American countries, securing funds in the United States, and coordinating efforts across denominational and national lines. It works in close cooperation with the CCLA staff and its member bodies.

RAVEMCCO has a similar relationship in the field of radio, audio-visual materials, and the general program of mass communication. Its most important contribution in the Latin American area up to the present has been its support of CAVE, the Evangelical Audio Visual Center in Brazil. For many years the CCLA had supported an audio-visual program headed up in Perú which promoted work shops in this field

for the Spanish speaking countries and provided taped radio programs for distribution. This has now been replaced by a RAVEMCCO plan for consultants in this field to work on a regional basis for discovering needs, developing materials, planning for their distribution, and educating the churches in their use. The first of these consultants is now in Mexico and has visited other parts of the Caribbean area. There are plans for a similar person to be located in Perú, in Buenos Aires, and possibly in Chile. Again, decisions about programs, personnel, or contributions are made after consultation with the CCLA and its members who are directly involved in the area concerned.

A third National Council agency, not so directly related to CCLA or the Division of Foreign Missions which has initiated programs in Latin America in recent years, is Church World Service. Since 1955 this organization has contributed to meeting the needs of people in some of these countries who are suffering because of disasters due to physical, social, economic, or political causes. They now have an active program in Jamaica, Haiti, Chile, Brazil, British Honduras, Grenada and the Bahamas, with a total North American staff of eleven besides forty-six locally employed personnel. The budget for these countries in 1961 calls for over \$90,000. This will undoubtedly be increased because of the recent hurricane disaster in British Honduras. All these programs are related to the national councils of churches in the country being served and to the local churches through which most of the actual work has to be done. Efforts are made to awaken the churches to the physical needs of the people of the community and to their responsibility in meeting those needs.

United Church Women have given assistance to the women of Latin America in the field of social education. Through the "Ayuda Cristiana Evangélica", in Chile, nutrition classes have been organized in the churches in the low income areas of Santiago and Valparaiso. The United Church Women of Chile have been assisted in developing a new program of social work and leaders are being trained for the social centers in the new housing units. A similar program of social education is underway in the "favelas" or slum areas, outside of Rio de Janeiro, through the "Departamento de Servicio Social, Confederação Evangelico do Brasil," made possible by United Church Women's assistance. Scholarships for women in Social Welfare and Adult Education are offered through the councils of churches in Brasil, Chile and Perú in order to help train leadership for the expanding work of the church women in these countries. The newly formed committee made up of both members and staff of the CCLA (Committee on Cooperation in Latin America) and CWS (Church World Service) should provide for better coordination and consultation on this total program.

Agricultural Missions, Inc. has cooperated in interdenominational consultations and conferences on "The Church's Mission Among Rural People." The most recent were held in Costa Rica, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador and Colombia during October and November of 1961. These meetings planned by missionaries and national leaders in the various countries, coincided with a field service tour of rural work by J. Benton Rhoades, former missionary to Latin America, Associate Executive Secretary of Agricultural Missions, Inc. and the Rural Missions Cooperating Committee of the National Council of Churches. They resulted in an increased fellowship among rural church leaders, and a clearer strategy for bringing the Gospel into the mainstream of rural life in the areas served by the various churches.

The World Council of Christian Education in Latin America

Although the World Council of Christian Education is not a North American organization, through its New York office it has been closely related to the Latin American area. This Council sponsored a Consultation on Christian Education which was held in Perú just preceding the Lima meeting in July 1961. The recommendations of this Consultation certainly hold many implications for the future, such as:

That a Latin American Commission on Christian Education be organized to represent all Christian councils or similar bodies in Latin America wishing to participate.

That regional offices related to the proposed Commission be set up for the Caribbean area, the Pacific Coast area, the Southern countries of South America area and Brazil.

That a Conference be called in 1962 to revise the textbooks of the "Curso Evangélico Hispanoamericano" (Sunday School Curriculum materials).

That as soon as possible area conferences be organized to plan a simplified version of the "Curso Evangélico Hispanoamericano," and also that a very elementary version be prepared for indigenous people, each in three grades - for children, teenagers, youth and adults.

That as soon as possible a conference be arranged to prepare the outline of a curriculum of Christian Education in weekday schools both primary and secondary.

That a conference be organized to prepare leadership training material including courses for use in local churches and for regional institutes.

That as soon as possible a conference be called to prepare a three-year program for Daily Vacation Bible Schools.

That a conference be arranged in 1962 for the leaders of youth work in the churches.

That assistance be given to ULAJE (Unión Latinoamericana de Juventudes Evangélicas) to employ a full-time organizing Secretary during 1962 to prepare for the ULAJE Congress in December, 1962; and that consideration of a full-time secretary for ULAJE be subject to action by the ULAJE Congress and the provision of adequate financial support.

That an intensive training course for youth leaders be set up in suitable Latin American seminaries provided financial support can be obtained.

That a Christian Education Secretary with special competence in youth work be found to serve as a staff member of the Christian Education Commission.

The Consultation directed that the Planning Committee for the Consultation be a continuing Committee to correspond with the councils of Latin America on these matters. It is understood that until a Christian Education Commission for Latin America is established, the Christian Education Committee of the Committee on Cooperation in Latin America, in cooperation with the World Council of Christian Education continue to carry on the cooperative activities agreed upon by the Latin American councils. It is also understood that the support of at least six Latin American councils would be necessary before the above bodies would sponsor a new cooperative project. Future relationships of the CCLA and the WCCE to this Latin American Commission on Christian Education will still have to be worked out.

Agencies Unrelated to NCCC With Work in Latin America

The organizations mentioned thus far are all related to the National Council of Churches or the World Council of Christian Education offices in North America. There are two other associations of foreign mission agencies which are related to the work in the Latin American area which have no relation to these councils. They are the Evangeli-

cal Foreign Missions Association and the Inter-Denominational Foreign Missions Association of North America. The Evangelical Foreign Missions Association, with thirty-four agencies working in the Latin American area, describes itself as "an association of foreign mission boards for the purpose of providing: 1) united representation before government; 2) a basis for fellowship; 3) a panel for promoting cooperative effort; 4) information concerning government regulations and international affairs which affect foreign missions; 5) service along the following lines - passports and other legal documents, travel reservation service, equipment and supplies, missionary conferences, information service." Some of its member missions have been at work in the Latin American area for many years. The majority, however, have begun their work fairly recently.

The Inter-Denominational Foreign Missions Association of North America (IFMA) states that it "is a fellowship of mission societies without denominational affiliations. The basis of fellowship is a oneness of heart and mind in the things of the Lord and a common adherence to the historic Christian faith as expressed in a doctrinal statement of nine points." Its eighteen member societies with work in Latin America reflect many of the characteristics of conservative Protestant Christianity in North America. Though they themselves do not have denominational affiliations, they have established churches in the various countries where they are at work. These in many cases have become the dominant Protestant influence in the area. This is especially true in the countries of Central America and northern South America.

Not organizationally related to the above associations, but involving many of their member boards and agencies, are two other organizations which should be mentioned. Their functions and programs are similar to those of Lit-Lit and RAVEMCCO of the National Council of Churches. They are LEAL (Literatura Evangélica para América Latina) and DIA (Difusiones Inter-Americanas). In its 1959 report LEAL included the following information:

"There are 45 organizations affiliated in active membership with voice and vote in this assembly. Twenty-four of these are located in Latin America; 21 in the United States. Of the 24 Latin American members, 17 are publishers of Gospel literature and/or bookstores, 7 are associations of churches. Of the North American members, 3 are publishers of Spanish Gospel materials; the rest are missions interested in supporting this ministry. LEAL has headquarters in Costa Rica where it has been granted legal incorporation with the Costa Rica government under the name LECTURA PARA AMERICA LATINA as a non-profit, cultural association.

“One of LEAL’s major services is to keep evangelicals abreast with literature activities - new books, bookstores, magazines, tracts, publisher’s plans, distribution programs and literature-related projects. To avoid overlapping and duplications, LEAL seeks to serve as a clearing house for publications. Bulletins have carried information on translations and books being planned for publication in the future. An editorial survey was made to have on file all existent publications in Spanish. LEAL’s major objective is to promote the maximum production, circulation and use of literature in fulfillment of the Great Commission. Without entering directly into the field of publication, LEAL’s purpose is to step up distribution, foster a wider dissemination of Gospel literature, and offer suggestions and technical assistance for improving present methods. It has considered the preparation and training of literature personnel of primary importance.”

DIA was organized at the Cali Congress on Gospel Communications in September 1959. It is the successor to an earlier organization known as the Pan American Christian Network and has as its purpose to produce, process, distribute and promote radio and television programs, recordings and audio-visual aids for the evangelizing of Latin America. It was incorporated May 9, 1960.

Its members include seven Evangelical radio stations and fourteen mission boards and agencies interested in broadcasting and other audio-visual aids. A part of their program will include workshops in radio and television.

What of the Future?

Although we realize that this is by no means an exhaustive list of North American organizations and agencies related to Latin American Protestantism, it is perhaps sufficient to show something of the confused, overlapping, and sometimes competitive pattern of these relationships.

There are a few points which seem to be clear:

The Committees, Departments, and Divisions related to the National Council of Churches in the United States seem to have their lines clearly drawn and channels open for working cooperatively in the Latin American area. The Committee on Cooperation in Latin America is still the committee with the responsibility for coordinating activities and contributions of these various agencies. It is expected that this will be true of any new programs that may appear in the future and that it may provide the stimulus for creative new ventures into which the Holy Spirit may be leading.

There is a definite need for continued conversation and increasing cooperation with other North American Missionary Associations which are related to the work in the Latin American countries. As Bishop Newbigin told the Lima Conference in its first public session, "Our differences testify against us that we have not found in Christ a reconciliation deeper than our differences. If we who confess one Lord are so divided, some of us have misunderstood and misinterpreted Him. Each one of us must ask, 'Lord, is it I?'"

North American churches and church agencies must realize that they have been responsible in part, at least, for the present social unrest which is embroiling all of Latin America in a far reaching revolution. In the Consultation on Church and Society which was held in Perú previous to the Lima Conference, in July 1961, it was agreed to continue its work through a Latin American Commission (Junta) on Church and Society, to be organized under auspices of the study commissions of the church federations in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Mexico.

It was also proposed that this Commission call a second Latin American Consultation on church and society in two years, and that in 1962 it sponsor, in cooperation with the Committee on Cooperation in Latin America (CCLA), a hemispheric discussion to develop a better understanding of the nature of the crisis brought by rapid social change and to assist each other in making a true Christian witness in this situation. When such a discussion takes place, it will be interesting to note how far the Alliance for Progress has gone in finding solutions to the problems of the hemisphere and how far Jesus Christ has been found to be their Hope!

Although this paper has dealt primarily with the relations between North and South American churches and organizations, it is realized that the Latin American churches are not just a part of the Christian community of this hemisphere. There is a growing awareness on the part of the Latin American churches that they are a part of the Christian community of the whole world. The pattern of their relationship to each other and to World Christian bodies will have to be worked out by them but it is to be hoped that they will find ways to make their increasingly valuable contribution to the World Christian community.

The last point has to deal with the indigenization of the churches in the Latin American countries. This does not mean just having Argentine or Brazilian or Colombian leaders making decisions nor that the church becomes self-supporting and self-propagating. In

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